

*Carmel, NY* – Congressman John Hall (NY-19), Chairman of the House Veteran's Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, applauded the news today that the Veterans Administration (VA) will adopt a rule next week granting presumption of service connection to any veteran who served in a combat zone and has been diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Currently, veterans who apply for disability benefits to compensate for PTSD must demonstrate to the VA their illness is service related, essentially denying benefits to thousands of veterans unable to document their claims decades after their discharge from service. The new rule will make it easier for all veterans suffering from PTSD to receive VA health care and disability compensation. Also, disability benefits will be made available with the rule change to more veterans, including some who may have been denied benefits in the past.

"Less than half of the Iraq and Afghanistan veterans diagnosed with PTSD are receiving benefits from the VA. It is our duty to make sure the men and women who risk their lives and sacrifice so much for our values and freedoms, are taken care of when they return home," said Rep. Hall. "This rule will have a dramatic impact on Vietnam veterans as well. It can be especially difficult to find evidence of a traumatic incident 40 years after the fact. Many Vietnam veterans who were denied PTSD benefits in the past may now be eligible."

Congressman Hall has taken the lead on this issue, introducing the COMBAT PTSD Act (H.R. 952), which focused exclusively on creating a presumption of service connected disability for veterans diagnosed with PTSD. Hall discussed the issue with President Obama during a meeting at the White House in early 2009, which led to a meeting with Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. By August of 2009, the VA announced that it was drafting the rule.

"PTSD cases are routinely the most complicated cases for the VA to confirm, requiring drawn out investigations by the VA. This new rule cuts down on lengthy investigations and allows VA employees to focus their efforts on new cases and serve more of our veterans," said Rep. Hall.

The new rule will make it easier for all veterans suffering from PTSD to receive VA health care and disability compensation. This new rule makes disability benefits available to more veterans, including some who may have been denied benefits in the past.

Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America Legislative Associate Tom Tarantino said, "IAVA strongly supports this rule change and thanks Congressman Hall for his leadership on this issue. This change will benefit veterans of all generations, including those serving in our current conflicts."

"Finally, I can get the help I need with my PTSD," said Iraq War Veteran Robert Kingsley of Goshen, NY. "This problem has deeply impacted my life, and I struggle with it every day. Thank you Congressman Hall for recognizing that the VA needs to treat PTSD as a severe disability."

Since his election to the US House of Representatives in 2006, and as Chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, Congressman Hall has been a tireless advocate for the proper care of our veterans.

On Wednesday, Rep. Hall was warmly greeted by a large group of veterans and veterans advocates at a gathering held at the American Legion Yorktown Post #1009 in Yorktown Heights, NY. When he mentioned that the PTSD rule change was right around the corner, the veterans gave him a standing ovation and thanked him profusely for his efforts on their behalf.